

“God’s ultimate purpose: Ephesians 1:9-12”

Eighth Sunday after Trinity – August 2, 2020

Sermon Notes – Tom Mount – Holy Trinity Chico

Introduction

- **Where is the world headed? Where are you headed?** Paul is going to tell us by means of two leitmotifs or key concepts during the course of these four verses.

Exposition of 1:9-12

“He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him, to be put into effect in the fullness of the times, to unite under one head all things in Christ, the things in heaven and on earth in him.”

- The key idea in this unit is the Father’s uncompromising resolve to bring everything in space-time—everything that He created in all ages and in all places—together under the dominion of Jesus Christ.

“He has made known to us the mystery of His will”

- This connects us with what Paul said at the end of v.8, where we left off last week: God has lavished on us his grace, which includes all the spiritual wisdom and insight we could possibly ever need.
- **“the mystery of His will.”** Mystery is *mysterion*, used 27x in NT. Throughout the Mediterranean world, there were a number of so-called Mystery cults, dedicated to the worship of Dionysus, Cybele, Isis, Artemis and other gods.
- In the NT, mystery is a disclosure of something previously hidden in the inscrutable mind of God but now revealed by God’s Holy Spirit to Jesus’ apostles and through them, to the Church.

- **“according to His good pleasure.”** He did it because He wanted to do it; it gave him great personal delight to bring us in on what we intends to do in the fulfillment of human history.

- **“He purposed in Him [Jesus]”.** Yet again, we see this language of Christological inclusion: here is another benefit conveyed to us by means of our being relationally joined to Jesus Christ. This reminds us that salvation is not a thing. Salvation is a person (Jn 14:6; 17:3)

“to be put into effect in the fullness of the times, to unite under one head all things in Christ, the things in heaven and on earth in him.”

- **“to unite under one head”** is the single compound Grk. word, *Anakephalaioo*, meaning “to sum up, to gather together as one”. (Rom 13:9).

- The Lord Jesus will come to earth a second time, not in stealth as a baby swaddled in cloth, but as a conquering warrior king astride a war horse, accompanied by millions of angels and humans who have died before us, visible to the whole earth. This will set in motion a series of events—the establishment of Christ’s reign on earth, the defeat of all his enemies, the final judgment, the creation of a new heaven and earth where the Father, the Son, the spiritual beings currently in heaven and the redeemed human beings currently on earth all live together in shared space in harmony and peace and joy forever in a restored creation. All things will be summed up in Christ, united under his headship and kingly rule (Isa 45:23; Phil 2:9-11).

- Unredeemed humans and fallen spiritual beings will also acknowledge Jesus as Lord of Lords, not as elated worshipers, but as defeated, humiliated rebels.

- Those spiritual beings that disobeyed God in the stories of Genesis 3, 6 and 11—who have been kept imprisoned in Tartarus in the underworld will be released in the final judgment, where they will admit that Jesus is Lord.

- Those evil spirits that harass us in this life, and the dark principalities and powers that exert such terrible influence in the

heavenly realms over the affairs on earth, they will be subdued and bow their knees before the Christ.

- And those notorious humans who have hated the true God and been responsible for such vast destruction on the earth, who are now kept in Sheol in the underworld will be released to face judgment, and they will declare publicly that Jesus Christ is Lord.

- After this judgment, all spiritual and human beings who have opposed God and his plans and oppressed God's people will be consigned to the Lake of Fire, to exist forever in a terror of their own making. They will thus be given what they desire: to live life apart from God.

- Meanwhile, all spiritual and human beings who love the Lord and joyfully embrace His salvation and rule, will lovingly commune and justly reign with Christ over a reprimed, glorious and beautiful earth (Rev 21:3-4).

- The second key concept is contained in the next sentence:

“In Him also we have been chosen by God as His inheritance, having been predestined according to the plan of the One who is working out all things according to the purpose of His will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be to the praise of His glory. ”

- **“chosen by God as His inheritance”** is a phrase that translates a single compound verb, *kleroun*, a *hapex legomenon* (a word used just once in a body of literature). It means: “to appoint or choose for oneself by lot”.

- The idea is that God chose the Ephesian Christians (and, by extension, us) to be the portion or the inheritance that He wanted for himself over against all other options.

- It's an idea that Paul is going to return to in seven verses when, in Eph 1:18, Paul refers to: **“The riches of [God's] glorious inheritance in the saints”**.

- This concept was readily recognizable to the Jewish people. **Deut 7:6:** **“For you are a people holy to Yahweh your God. Yahweh your God has**

chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.”

· What they didn't know at the time—because it wasn't fully revealed but was still mostly hidden—was that, when God would later send Messiah, Jesus, and still later, the Holy Spirit, He would make a concerted effort to target the nations (the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people) with the Gospel to enfold them in his treasured inheritance. The new covenant He would make with Israel, replacing the one made at Sinai, would include all people, not just the natural descendents of Abraham and Sarah.

· This was the mystery Paul refers to here and in other contexts: that God's decision to disinherit the nations after the incident in Genesis 11 we call the Tower of Babel (but is more accurately the Ziggurat of Babylon) was only temporary. His intent all along was to offer salvation to the entire world and He had chosen Israel to be His means of doing that.

· In the Song of Moses in Deut 32, Moses says:

Deuteronomy 32:8-9

**“When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance (nachal),
when he divided (parad) the sons of Adam,
he fixed the borders of the peoples
according to the number of the sons of God.
⁹ But Yahweh's portion (cheleq) is his people,
Jacob his allotted (chebel) heritage (nachalah).”**

· The Jews of Jesus and Paul's day understood this to teach that, when God divided the sons of Adam (by confusing their language in judgment as they built the Ziggurat at Babylon in Genesis 11), he “fixed their borders” or assigned them geographical boundaries according to the number of the “sons of God” (beney elohim) or spiritual beings comprising the divine council. What was the number of the sons of God on God's council? Seventy. How many nations are described in the list of nations in Genesis 10? Seventy. So, what the Jews believed was that Yahweh judged the people after they tried to create their own manipulative religion, the ziggurat (a stairway to heaven). He judged them by saying, in effect: “Fine, you don't want to be in relationship with me, so I will put you under the authority of seventy members of my divine council, and I will start

fresh by starting a new nation from Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 12), and they will be “my portion”, my “allotted heritage”. According to Jewish tradition, those seventy divine council members later became corrupt and began ruling those nations violently and oppressively for their own selfish purposes and started seeking their worship, a fact that accounts for the many detestable foreign gods worshipped among the non-Israelite nations.

- And as far as the Jews knew, this disinheritance of the nations was a permanent arrangement. God had rejected humankind outright and made Israel his sole inheritance.

- Can you understand now why it came as such a shock to Peter, Paul and the other apostles that God’s disinheritance of the nations was only meant to be temporary, until “the fullness of times”, when Israel and the world were ripe for the sending of Messiah, God’s Son, to clear the way for all humankind to be reconciled to God? This is why Paul called it a mystery.

- Now, just as was the case with Israel, God’s choosing of us was not made on the basis of our inherent worthiness. He did not choose us because we have some intrinsic virtue: smarter or godlier or better than others.

- He chose us not because we are worthy; he chose us to make us worthy, to qualify us to share his life and his sacred space, to live with him forever in a full, free exchange of fellowship and love (Col 1:12).

“having been predestined according to the plan of Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of His will”

- In this single clause, Paul uses three words to describe God’s decisive, intelligent action on our behalf: Plan, *prothesis*; purpose, *boule*; will, *thelema*.

- Used together, these three words are calculated to describe God’s deliberate council, His decisive resolve, His intelligent, premeditated and carefully conceived decision to do certain things.

- You can see why what Paul is saying here is immensely reassuring to the Ephesian Christians. These guys believed their fates were determined by the impersonal movement of stars and planets and the conniving of unpredictable gods.

- Paul comes along and says: “Baloney! The truth is, before God laid foundation of the earth or made the stars or the spiritual beings you used to worship as gods, He chose you guys together with Jewish believers to be His very own, and has been active throughout the course of your life to protect you, provide for you and draw you to himself in Christ, so that for the rest of eternity you might share in his incomparable love, joy and fellowship”.

- Three things we should note about God’s plan mentioned here v.11:
 1. This plan for the unfolding of human history is eternal and it predates that history.

 2. This plan includes “everything”; *Pas*. Not just things having to do with redemption, but the entirety of God’s providential supervision of the cosmos. Jesus said that includes every sparrow that falls to the ground.

 3. God possesses the requisite power to carry out this plan. “Works out” is *energeo*: He has the energy or power to accomplish what he wills (Dan 4:35).

- FF Bruce: “His will may be disobeyed, but his ultimate purpose cannot be frustrated”.

- This gives us believers great assurance: “He’s got this” (Rom 8:28-20).

¹² in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

- The purpose of God’s choosing us is that we might by our very existence, testify to the rich, multi-faceted grace of God throughout eternity as living trophies of his grace and monuments to His mercy.

Take away

- Your destiny is to be a prince or princess in this life and the life to come: a child of the Heavenly Father and consort of the King of Kings, Lord Jesus. You will reign with Jesus over a recreated earth, where, as Habakkuk 2:14 says, **“The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”**

- As a child of the King, you now have in part, and will later have in full, authority, honor, rank and glory, and with them peace, purpose and incomparable joy. You will have important and enjoyable employment in the coming age. And your whole existence will be characterized by a profound and loving communion and rich intimacy with God and all creation which you cannot even now imagine. This is your destiny and mine.

- As the Apostle Paul summarized it so well in 1 Cor 2:9:

1 Corinthians 2:9

“As it is written: “Things that the eye has not seen, the ear has not heard, and which have not entered into the hearts of man, all this God has prepared for those who love Him.”